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**The ideological foundations and political relevancy of
National Bolshevism**

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History and Politics**

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Abstract

The subject of this dissertation is the extremist political ideology of National Bolshevism, looking at their historical and contemporary movements and dissecting their ideas and manifesto's. A typical understanding of National Bolshevism revolves around a very simplistic understanding of a crude combination of socialism and nationalism, or even parallels with the ideology of National Socialism due to their similar names, and this dissertation will prove this rudimentary idea about National Bolshevism is incorrect and instead show that National Bolshevism has a complicated history within both the extreme right and left, with distinctive ideas unique to their world view and political ideology. This dissertation will systematically break down the history of the National Bolshevik movement and its key figures, along with their ideological foundations, as well as a brief analysis of their political relevance in both the past and present, by utilizing works produced by National Bolsheviks and works done by historians who have gone in great depths to research very small and historically minor groups. This dissertation will present a unique view of National Bolshevism while supporting its arguments with reference to other historical and political interpretations of this ideology.

Table of Contents:

Acknowledgements. 2

Abstract. 3

List of Illustrations. 5

Introduction. 6

The Origins of German National Bolshevism. 9

The ideology of German National Bolshevism. 15

The relevancy of National Bolshevism in Germany. 19

The Origins of Soviet/Russian National Bolshevism. 21

The ideology of Russian National Bolshevism. 27

The relevancy of Russian National Bolshevism. 31

Conclusion. 33

Bibliography. 36

Primary. 36

Secondary. 37

List of Illustrations:

Figure One: Volunteers of the “Essence of time movement” pose for a picture in the Donbass region of Ukraine, October 8, 2014, Mosaic Forum.

Introduction

National Bolshevism is a unique ideology among political radicals because it combines two seemingly opposing ideologies, international socialism and revolutionary nationalism. This essay will examine the intellectual roots of National Bolshevism, as well as the ideology's significant leaders, as well as its current status and relevance in modern politics. The topic of this essay is important because understanding both the material circumstances that lead to the creation of new radical ideologies and their ideological foundations are important for understanding why extremist groups continue to exist in various political environments and what motivates people to join these organisations, as well as providing a lens to comprehend what inspires their existence in the first place, what do they provide as solutions that other more mainstream political ideologies do not provide. Understanding how small groups of political radicals' form and new ideologies emerge allows for a better understanding of other radical groups that, while intellectually having little in common with National Bolshevism, may be established through their rhetoric and political radicalism with common causes and recurrent trends identified.

The starting point for National Bolshevism was the Weimar Republic, which existed from 1919 to 1933 following the backdrop of Germany's disastrous defeat in WW1 and the dissolution of the German Empire, economic mismanagement, feelings of national humiliation and political radicalism provided National Bolshevism the material conditions needed for the birth of a new revolutionary movement that combines both nationalist rhetoric and Marxian class struggle politics. The founders of this early movement were generally Marxists who were dissatisfied with the official communist party line of immediate revolution to support the Soviet governments in both Hungary and the former Russian

Empire, instead advocating a policy of unifying nationalists and communists to revert the post World War One settlement and reestablish Germany as a great power, the Lauffenberg and Wolffheim communists provide the first example of an ideology described as “National Bolshevik”, however the main source for German national bolshevism will be Kael Otto Paetel, who drafted the first “National Bolshevik Manifesto”, the work of Paetel and his comrades provide the first official manifesto of a self-declared National Bolshevik, movement being key to the dissection of early National Bolshevik ideology. Another key point of reference is James Ward’s “Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics”, which goes to great lengths to analyse the ideology of early German National Bolshevik theorists and organisations. Using this source alongside the self-published works of National Bolshevik theorists, provides an apt dissection and breakdown of both their political philosophy and political relevancy within their most active periods. Later examples of National Bolshevism, such as in the USSR and the Russian Federation, run into several problems that make research difficult. The understanding of National Bolshevism in the USSR changes the definition slightly from a distinctive political ideology separate from revolutionary Marxism to instead the state policies of the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union, but understanding this change in state ideology is still critical to analysing the very early motivations for founding a National Bolshevik Party once the USSR dissolved, having a lot of influence over influential figures and current political parties on how they view Soviet Era nationalism. There are also fewer sources throughout the early Russian National Bolshevik movement, with the sources being mostly limited to catalogues of their acts and publications authored by followers of this political ideology, implying that their work contains some degree of bias. However, this essay will take that into account and will use as many third-party sources as possible to support the statements of followers of this ideology.

By breaking down this essay into two distinct political settings, one German and one Russian, this

project will contrast both movements and draw similarities and differences between the two, explaining why one has persisted while the other has faded into obscurity. The core focus of this project will remain not as much the current political situation of these movements but rather the ideological differences and the historical foundations of this movement of political radicalism. Despite this, this project will explain the current political realities of this movement and what has happened to a once if not influential political ideology, at least a remarkably interesting one, a policy of combining both political extremes to create a new ideology with the goal of removing the flaws of both the far right and far left, at least in the eyes of the National Bolsheviks.

The Origins of German National Bolshevism.

National Bolshevism as a distinct ideology has its roots in the revolutionary Marxism of the Weimar republic. Following the 1918 German revolution which saw the abdication of the emperor and signing of the Treaty of Versailles which brought World War One to an end, revolution was in the air as radical socialist and communist groups fighting under a general banner of spartacist's who sought the establishment of a socialist state built on similar to the recent revolution in the Russian Empire, they contrasted with the social democrats and right wing who sought a tactical alliance to defeat the revolutionaries and instead establish a general government based around a liberal parliamentary system and reform society instead of a radical overthrow.¹ This era of conflict of between internationalist communism and nationalism, was a violent and bloody era in the Weimar republic with attempted coups and counter coups being the political norm, from the Spartacist uprising to the Kapp Putsch, these years of revolution and counter revolutionary potential had a great impact of the political thinking's of both the far left and far right, certain revolutionary Marxist's began to theorise of a potential alliance between far right forces such as the Freikorps, despite the Freikorps movement largely consisting of former veterans of the Great war and right wing citizens vehemently opposed to a socialist Germany and later utilized by Gustav Noske, a social democrat government official who in his own words; "if I had to choose between a bad socialist officer and a good conservative officer, I should choose the conservative",² this pragmatic policy despite being used against the people who would later go on to be a part of the National Bolshevik movement, gives an insight into the rational of these early National Bolsheviks, a pragmatic response to the failings of the revolutionary left in Germany, that perhaps while not ideologically pure, this pragmatism could be used to finally be victorious in their revolutionary aims. German National Bolshevism was largely founded by two individuals, Heinrich Lauffenberg and Fritz Wolffheim, members of the "left" of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) they had formulated a policy with a distinct split from the orthodox Marxism of the KPD, due to their opposition to the new Leninist line of democratic centralism, a policy summarised by Lenin as "Freedom of discussion, unity of action" ³, their policy rejected in the short-term Marxist class struggle and instead strived for a class

¹ Ralf Hoffrogge, "Working-Class Politics in the German Revolution," *Historical Materialism*, 77 (2014) 93-100

² Jones Nigel, *A brief History of the birth of the Nazis* (London: Robinsons, 2004), 49.

³ V.I. Lenin, "Lenin: Report on the Unity Congress of the R.S.D.L.P", Marxists, 1906, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/rucong/index.htm>.

truce between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, their slogan was “a National Liberation war, not class war” their goal was for the national bourgeoisie of Germany to enter into an alliance with the workers of Germany to fight a new people’s war against the victorious allied powers and re-establish German national prestige and independence, all while entering an alliance with the Soviet Union, who at the time had no international partners. ⁴ Lauffenberg and Wolffheim had reinvented revolutionary Marxism while rejecting much of its tenants, they viewed States as having inherent characteristics, Germany had an inherently proletarian nature and as such a proletarian revolution was guaranteed in the future, however due to the involvement of foreign “reactionary powers”⁵ the revolution would not be permitted to succeed, while not abandoning class struggle in the long term as seen by the language of a class “truce”⁶, implying that there will be a period where class struggle re-emerges once the conflict against the allies has been concluded. This gave them increasing popularity among the revolutionary and eager spartacist movement; however, their popularity would wane greatly following the movements and more importantly to the KPD cadres, a letter condemning them from the leading communist figure, Lenin⁷, describing their theories and goals for a cross class collaboration against the West as a “crying absurdity”, which would lead to their expulsion from the KPD and helped to create a new communist party, the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD)⁸ which was an ultra-left splinter group of the KPD, rejecting parliamentarism and other tactics utilised by the KPD.

While Lauffenberg and Wolffheim were the first to use the term National Bolshevism and no investigation into the ideological foundations is complete without examining their beliefs, the most important figures in early German National Bolshevism are instead Ernst Niekisch, the author of the journal resistance and Kael Otto Paetel, the author of the National Bolshevik manifesto, the first attempt at a written manifesto describing their beliefs and goals and ideological foundations, German National Bolshevism for the most part has ideological connections to the revolutionary left of German politics, despite as previously mentioned there being ideological and organisational differences between the Leninist KPD and the various National Bolshevik groups, for instance by Karl Radek who once was an

⁴ Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution: Germany, 1918 to 1923*. (London: Bookmarks, 1982), 194-195.

⁵ Nigel, *History of the Nazis*, 53.

⁶ Hoffrogge, “Working-Class Politics in the German Revolution,” 90-100.

⁷ Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism: A Study in the Origins of the State Party* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 29.

⁸ Philippe Bourrinet, *The Dutch and German communist left 1900-1968*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), 76

early supporter of the National Bolshevik Movement who saw it as a way to have a soviet friendly Germany break the international isolation of the soviet union⁹. There remained a great deal of collaboration between communists and National Bolsheviks, particularly across youth movements that were more detached from the higher up's ideological disagreements and were more interested in a pragmatic approach to politics, rejecting ideological puritanism and instead adopting a policy of finding common ground with right wing groups and revolutionary nationalists.

Karl Otto Paetel, a nationalist journalist attempted throughout his career to bridge the gap between the NSDAP and KPD by combining the NSDAP's Nationalist and expansionist foreign policy with the KPD's revolutionary socialism to create a new Germany in which the entire Germanic Volk (meaning People or identity) would be united in a revolutionary socialist state, rejecting the exclusionary Nazi definition of Volk and the purely working-class approach of the KPD.¹⁰ In July, 1929, Paetel along with his comrades and loyal followers created a group called the "The Group of Social Revolutionary Nationalists" (GSRN) following the disappointing result of the 1928 German elections in which the revolutionary right lost ground to the social democratic SPD and Communist KPD, the shift of the working classes from the militarist far right is attributed by some for the right wing's failure to address social and labor issues which led to their abandonment by the working class.¹¹ This prompted some freikorps and paramilitary right-wing groups to propose the idea around of working with revolutionary working-class movements to overthrow the liberal order and bring in a new Germany¹². The GSRN was divided on who to support so a nationalist and socialist revolution to manifest, this was quickly dispelled after the publication of the KPD manifesto, which included a section titled "Programme for the National and Social Liberation of the German People"¹³, within this programme the KPD criticised the NSDAP for while it fought against all international treaties such as the Locarno treaties and young plan which were plans for the western borders of Germany to be respected while the eastern borders were left open to revision and a reduction in war debt owed to the victorious powers of WW1.¹⁴) The KPD claimed it was the only party that was opposed to both the enslavement of the German nation by international powers and the protectors of the German proletariat from exploitative elements of German society, this manifesto was

⁹ Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution*, 253.

¹⁰ Karl Paetel, *Sozialrevolutionärer Nationalismus*. (Mainz: Buchvertriebsgesellschaft Helios, 1986), 35.

¹¹ Ward James, "Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics? The Group of Social Revolutionary Nationalists in the Weimar Republic," *Journal of contemporary history* 15, no. 3 (July 1980): 515.

¹² Ward, "Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics?" , 516.

¹³ Ward, "Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics?" , 519

¹⁴ Ward, "Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics?" , 519-520.

published in order to pull support from the resurgent NSDAP following their recent electoral success. This publication was especially aimed at the working-class supporters of the SA and fighting groups, whom Heiden Konrad described as "Beef Steak Nazis", brown on the outside (The color of the SA's uniform) while being communists on the inside¹⁵. This publication was considered by many within the GSRN as confirming that their ideology had become widely accepted throughout the German Communist movement and that the KPD deserved their support while the NSDAP was to be sapped of its radical members in order to bolster their own influence.¹⁶ National Bolshevism's influence throughout Germany during the 1930's grew with the successes of the NSDAP and its ultra nationalist ideology, many on the left especially within the KPD began to see nationalism as a tool which could be used to draw support from the more radical members of the Nazi party or those within the "left wing" of the Nazi party such as the strasserists, who advocated for a confrontation with the German industrial and political elite in contrast to Hitler's policy of coopting their support by promising them a future within the new Reich. While this new campaign combining Nationalism and Bolshevism within the KPD differed from the actual National Bolshevism of Paetel and other thinkers, in several ways, simply being a form of Nationalistic Communism, which was noted by Paetel himself as being simple slogans and that the Communists would have to do more if they wanted an actual alliance with the revolutionary right,¹⁷. Other radical right members such as Otto Strasser, who interpreted this as a communist attempt to co-opt the radical right in order to push their "repugnant Marxist ideology"¹⁸. The gap between the GSRN and the NSDAP would continue to widen throughout the 1930's and the National Bolsheviks would find themselves in a closer alliance with the communists as time went on, the unifying factor between the two groups was their view of foreign capital and imperialism within Germany, with a prominent National Bolshevik stating that Germany had to smash capitalism in order to fully liberate it's self from foreign domination, this theme of Nationalists having to fight domestic capitalism and foreign institutions in order to achieve a fully free and independent nation state was common among members of radical Nationalist groups throughout the 1920's while not a National Bolshevik another prominent socialist nationalist, Irish radical James Connolly echoed this point when he declared "If you remove the English Army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin castle, unless you set about the organisation of the

¹⁵ Heiden Konrad, *Hitler: A Biography* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1936), 390, <https://archive.org/details/hitler00konr/page/390/mode/2up?q=red>.

¹⁶ Ward, "Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics?", 523.

¹⁷ Ward, "Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics?", 520.

¹⁸ Ward, "Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics?", 521.

Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, landlords and financiers.”¹⁹ This demonstrates while the National Bolshevik organisations prevalent within German political life in the 1920’s to 1930’s may have had little influence themselves their ideology of a nationalist socialist state which would combat both international and domestic capital along with unifying their nation through a strong National Body of revolutionary ideology, had great appeal on both the right and left of the political spectrum with both sides of the political spectrum attempting to court the National Bolsheviks and those who held similar beliefs, with the Reich Defense Ministry citing statements by Paetel as evidence that National Bolshevik theory was becoming increasingly attractive to some of the youth within the NSDAP²⁰.

This, however revealed their primary weakness as an ideology; both the left and right were hesitant to fully embrace them, with Communists skeptical of their willingness to work with the national bourgeoisie and the radical right fearful of their close association with leftism and support for the Soviet Union and international communism. This left them desired by both sides of the political spectrum but never fully trusted and often instead used to win over members of the public who were distrustful of internationalism following the Great War and how to many the international community had punished them unfairly, a new, nationalistic vision for addressed these concerns of foreign domination and influence. This, however left them as political outsiders with no camp to influence national politics and instead being limited to smaller lobbying groups to attempt to influence the dominant political powers of the SDP, KPD and NSDAP. The National Bolsheviks would be suppressed under the NSDAP, with many influential members sent to concentration camps, such as Ernst Niekisch who would be convicted for “Literacy High Treason”. Following the Second World War and the defeat of Nazism, there would be a general disinterest in National Bolshevik ideology, West Germany was disinterested in anything to do with revolutionary Marxism and pursued a policy of building a new liberal society closely tied with the western world, whereas East Germany, while incorporating certain elements of nationalism into its official political ideology, in a hope of building a new socialist culture to contrast to the imperial past of Germany, was largely unsuccessful as many leading Communist figures were marred by accusations of dual loyalty, two both the Soviet Union and Germany, an idea that damaged the development of a

¹⁹ “James Connolly: Socialism and Nationalism,” Marxists.org, 1897, accessed March 13, 2023, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1897/01/socnat.htm>.

²⁰Ward, “Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics?”, 517.

uniquely German national identity²¹. The East German government instead pursued a fierce internationalist foreign policy, inviting students from across the globe to study at GDR universities and receive a socialist and proficient education²² while also sending military advisors to revolutionary governments around the world, to build up their legitimacy of an anti-imperialist, new Germany that would stand in contrast to the Germanies of old.

The ideology of German National Bolshevism.

²¹ Orlow Dietrich. "The GDR's Failed Search for a National Identity, 1945-1989," *German Studies Review* 29, no. 3 (2006): 539-540. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27668125>.

²² Orlow, "The GDR's Failed Search for a National Identity", 555.

National Bolshevism was almost entirely contained within the German Republic, creating a unique blend of ideological foundations for the National Bolshevik movement, this early form of National Bolshevism, was a strictly socialist ideology with roots within revolutionary Marxism. Patel's National Bolshevik Manifesto provides valuable insight into the beliefs and ideological contrasts of National Bolshevism with 20th Century German Marxism. National Bolshevik ideology can be summarized around the following four points:

1. The belief that class struggle is a political reality.²³
2. The Veneration of the Volk (People) and the desire for the creation of a new identity developed independently of capitalist influence, to a new “pure” Volk.²⁴
3. Socialism in a distinctly German style and taking into account the uniqueness of the German people's material conditions.²⁵
4. Revolutionary foreign policy in which Germany will assume leadership as a leader of the oppressed against the capitalist world order.²⁶

To National Bolsheviks, Class struggle is a core part of the world view, to reject class struggle to National Bolsheviks is to ignore a fact of politics and life itself, as Paetel states “*The class struggle is not an invention of the 'Jew Marx.'...It is a fact of daily life, reflecting the labor contract between employer and employee, as well as the functions of press, state, and cultural life.*”²⁷ To Paetel class struggle is a core part of politics and to reject class struggle is to ignore one of the most influential political force within a society. George Osten in his work “Nationalism and Class struggle” states, “The name of this path is class struggle. The goal is the Nation”.²⁸ To National Bolsheviks, class struggle and an alliance with the workers against the forces of the ruling class, capital and imperialism can be used to create a new nation

²³ Kael Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, (1933), 66,
<https://archive.org/details/PaetelNationalBolshevistManifesto/page/n1/mode/2up>.

²⁴ Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 40.

²⁵ Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 63.

²⁶ Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 72.

²⁷ Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 66.

²⁸ Georg Osten, *Nationalism and Class Struggle*, March 10, 2023,
<https://arplan.org/2023/01/19/nationalism-and-class-struggle-osten/>.

in which the forces of the people can triumph over the oppressors and implement a new just regime that will recreate both society and the nation state in a revolutionary nationalist image with socialist economics. This contrasts to Marxism, in which the state apparatus is to be seized to ensure the development of socialism and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat to make the eventual shift to a stateless and classless society. To the National Bolsheviks the Nation and its reinvention remains the goal with no plans to replace it with an international class identity. To them the state is the guarantor of freedom and liberty, in the National Bolshevik Manifesto Paetel rejects Frederick Engels notion that “it is utter nonsense to speak of a free peoples state”²⁹ to Paetel and other National Bolsheviks the state can be changed into a revolutionary institution that ensures and supports the freedom of the working classes and Volk as a whole, this is different to the Marxist position of the state existing as a tool of simple class oppression which should be disbanded once the class struggle is complete. To the National Bolsheviks the development of the state can be done in such a way that it becomes a true people’s state which fosters a sense of unity and brotherhood throughout society and acts as a unifying force rather than a force of class repression.

Further expanding on the point of differences between the Marxists and National Bolsheviks, many Marxist states pursued a policy of creating a new culture such as the Soviet idea of a “New Soviet Man” which was intended to be a break away from the ethnic tensions of the former Tsarist Empire and create a new culture and people that are distinctly different from their original ethnicities.³⁰ The German National Bolshevik’s rejected this, the idea of forsaking their culture and historical legacy was the antithesis of their radical German nationalism, instead the German National Bolsheviks Keeping with German political tradition of the veneration of the Volk, the National Bolsheviks reject what was to them the current Volk which to them was corrupted by capitalism and foreign imperialism and instead embrace a future esoteric Volk in which they shed all connections to the corrupting influence of capitalism and foreign influence, great focus is put on “Roman law” in Germany by the National Bolsheviks which to them recognizes private property as a commodity to be owned by individuals, while German law only recognises the Clan and the Volk community as the only legitimate owners of land and the nation's resources.³¹ This veneration of the Volk as the most important stage is the simple

²⁹ Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 45.

³⁰ Mikhail Geller, *Cogs in the wheel: The Formation of Soviet man*, (New York: Knopf, 1988) ,13.

³¹ Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 29-30.

statement that “Highest above all is the Volks right to exist”³² This simple statement shows the immense importance the Volk has in the ideological foundations of the National Bolsheviks.

The emphasis on German culture, politics and socialist policy is present throughout most National Bolshevik work, Heinz Gollong a minor National Bolshevik who worked extensively alongside the previously mentioned GSRN, called for German society to break from “western civilization” which he saw as inherently destructive to the German people and instead reforge a new Volkish cultural community within a “Greater German People’s Council State” that would undergo both a physical and spiritual transformation to create a free and independent Volksgemeinschaft (roughly translated as a people’s community)³³ . The National Bolshevik manifesto also frequently references to the unique nature of German political and economic life that require a distinctly German approach, for instance in the National Bolshevik manifesto, there is frequent remarks to “German National Communism” rather than national communism in general, meaning to the National Bolsheviks that the conditions of the German people is unique in its challenges and solutions, with distinctive German goals for Europe. Paetel devotes an entire chapter to the inhumanity of the Treaty of Versailles and refers to the “Settlement of the East”³⁴ a desire of many Volkish and Nationalist groups in Germany who understand Germany had a divine right to create a Mitteleuropa, a pan German nationalist plan for a German dominated central and eastern Europe with a greater Germany who would exert influence and control over most of Europe, unifying the continent under its leadership and military might.³⁵

This German nationalist vision translates into their foreign policy, which is a core part of National Bolshevism, the desire for an internationally hegemonic Germany that can ensure its national sovereignty and secure its independence from foreign powers. The concept of a greater or natural Germany was exceedingly popular throughout the post World War One era. Almost all radical groups in

³² Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 40-41.

³³ “*The Group of Social-Revolutionary Nationalists*,” May 23, 2021, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://arplan.org/2021/05/23/group-of-social-revolutionary-nationalists-gsrn/>.

³⁴ Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 29.

³⁵ Willenz, Erik. “Germany and Mitteleuropa: Retrospect and Prospect.” *German Politics & Society*, no. 28 (1993): 53–67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23735074>.

Germany had a desire for overturning the Treaty of Versailles, seeing it as a national disgrace by foreign powers which harmed the German people's right to a unified German. The National Bolsheviks combined the positions of both the left and right by advocating for an alliance with the Soviet Union to oppose the western powers, this was however not an alliance based on defending the birthplace of international communism and the home of the revolution as the Communists desired, instead as an alliance based according to Paetel, on the idea that the USSR was the only European power to be opposed to the Treaty of Versailles³⁶ Unlike many communist groups the National Bolshevik movement did not pledge loyalty to Moscow and the internationalist communist movement it instead sought an alliance where Germany would lead a "League of Oppressed Nations" in which Germany would have "under German leadership"³⁷ while nominally anti-imperialist and revolutionary, rejecting colonial ambitions, the attitude of old "Prussianism" in which notions of German arrogance and superiority still persist, German revanchism is also prevalent in their work, mention of resolving the "polish question" with the USSR³⁸. Ernst Niekisch's also has similar themes throughout, in which he states his dismay at the politicians who would only "Hang the November Criminals" (A reference to the politicians who signed the Treaty of Versailles), only focusing on domestic politics and would in his words "will afterward probably have to let the French go free; they will scarcely have sufficient force in reserve to inflict upon the latter the justice they deserve"³⁹. To National Bolsheviks not only must Germany lead the oppressed groups of the world against imperialism, but it must also punish those that have wronged it, the French and British. whom the National Bolsheviks see as the enemies of both a socialist and unified Germany. The National Bolsheviks, combine right wing revanchism with Prussian attitudes of the states surrounding Germany, which are to be settled by Germans or brought under German control to create a new Mitteleuropa. With Leftist solidarity with colonized nations and people which should unite to overthrow the dominant imperialist powers and create a new patriotic socialist league which would ensure National liberation for all. These positions together show the contradictions and complicated political beliefs of the early National Bolshevik movement, a political movement which is both expansionist and revanchist but also nominally anti-imperialist.

³⁶ Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 34.

³⁷ Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 72.

³⁸ Paetel, *The National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 72-73.

³⁹ Ernst Niekisch, "Where we stand," *Widerstand* 2, no. 2 (1926): 1

The relevancy of National Bolshevism in Germany

Since the reunification of Germany, radical nationalist movements in Germany have had limited political influence across the political spectrum, the largest nationalist organisation in the modern German state is the AFD, a distinctly rightwing populist political party.⁴⁰ However, they depart from the historical legacy of revolutionary conservative nationalism of previous German nationalism and instead utilize a more modern populist nationalism to appeal to the German population. Radical nationalism is largely limited to a few small groups, dedicated to violent activism such as the “National Socialist Underground” and the “Reichsbürger Movement” the former a now defunct organisation that was responsible for a string of ethnically targeted murders in the early 2000’s and a distinctly Neo-Nazi organization , while the later was involved in the planning of a coup to overthrow the German government and revert to a government and political system reminiscent of Imperial Germany⁴¹. Despite the developing problem of right-wing nationalism within Germany, National Bolshevism seems to have received very little traction in modern Germany, the focus on the German right is Neo Fascism and in some instances Monarchism, with very little interest in a political ideology that has its origins in revolutionary leftism. The modern German left likewise has little interest in radical nationalism, following the collapse of East Germany radical leftism has generally fallen out of political relevancy, with social democratic parties and liberal organizations absorbing a lot of former radical members. There has instead been a total shift away from nationalism within the German left, groups such as the small “anti-Germans” reject German nationalism totally and its history with antisemitism, being fervently Zionist and pro-Israel, while a small movement within the German left, it provides an insight into how hostile the German left is to nationalism of any sort within Germany. The other element of the German left has instead returned to more orthodox Marxist Leninist approach to revolutionary politics. The new KPD, a minor party German political party, frequently publishes letters of support for more nationalistic forms of socialism abroad, such as North Korea despite this, in its 10-point manifesto it makes no reference to German nationalism and instead defines itself as a strictly internationalist party.⁴² National Bolshevism in the modern German state has

⁴⁰ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy,” in *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader*, ed. Cas Mudde (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1-10.

⁴¹ Klinkauer Thomas, “German Neo-Nazis and a New Party,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 30, no. 12 (2019): 243–52. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26642828>.

⁴² “Kommunistische partei Deutschlands,” KPD.org, February 13, 2023, accessed March 18, 2023, <http://www.k-p-d.org/index.php/kpd/grundsatzdokumente/die-10-grundsaeetze-der-kommunistischen-partei-deutschlands-kpd>.

little to no relevancy beyond historical interests, with there being no political party within Germany self-identifying as National Bolshevik or espousing National Bolshevik ideas. The relevancy of German National Bolshevism is effectively that of a dead ideology with little hope for revival barring extraordinary circumstances.

The Origins of Soviet/Russian National Bolshevism

Soviet National Bolshevism has a different origin when compared to the German branch, the success of the Russian revolution in establishing the world's first socialist state had a profound impact on the formation of an ideology that can be classified as National Bolshevik. The "Smenovekhovtsy" movement, which was a small group of former whites who, according to Tony Wilson, the tradition within Russian conservatism of Statism,⁴³ That is to aim for a centralized power structure that can control large sections of the economy and political life of a country. An ideology was developed that was willing to collaborate with the Bolsheviks, as they were according to the historian Robert V Daniel, "the restorers of Russian national power and imperial unity"⁴⁴ to the Smenovekhovtsy, the Bolsheviks provided a gateway that would succeed reforming imperial Russian power and rebuilding the state in a way to succeed where the Romanovs failed, creating a state that could dominate eastern Europe. While the Smenovekhovtsy weren't socialists and were strictly conservatives, they saw the Soviet Regime as having the potential to return to a nationalistic empire. The admiration for a decisive and powerful state crossed the left-right spectrum, this support was always fleeting, as the Bolsheviks were always expected to reform or be swept aside by a state more in line with traditional conservative Russian Nationalism.⁴⁵ The willingness of certain white movement elements to collaborate with the new Soviet system can be seen in a practical setting with the 1934 Soviet invasion of Xinjiang to secure their interests in the region and reassert influence in a crumbling Chinese sphere, during the invasion White army soldiers and Red Army fought side by side.⁴⁶ Former White intellectuals and authors also sought to return to Russia not because of any belief in Marxism but instead a nationalistic ideal that Russia, no matter the system of governance was their homeland and that it was their duty to support it, a key member of this group was Aleksey Tolstoy, a Russian author, who despite fleeing Russia during the revolution would return six years later and become a key part of Soviet literature and live a life of luxury

⁴³ Tony Wilson, "Untitled," review of *Coming to Terms with Soviet Regime. The 'Changing Signposts' Movement Among Russian Émigrés in the Early 1920s*, by Hilde Hardeman, *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 1997. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23806825>.

⁴⁴ Robert V Daniels, "Lost Branches of History," review of *The Other Bolsheviks: Lenin and His Critics, 1904-1914*, by Robert C. Williams. *The Russian Review* 49, 1990. <https://doi.org/10.2307/130528>.

⁴⁵ Daniels, Branches of History.

⁴⁶ Mark Dickens, "The Soviets in Xinjiang," Academia.edu, 1990, https://www.academia.edu/398262/The_Soviets_In_Xinjiang.

compared to the vast majority of the Soviet populace, living a "millionaires lifestyle".⁴⁷ This would go on to create a relative level of legitimacy among certain sectors of the Emigre movement while also giving the Soviet Union access to the vast pool of intellectuals, officers and specialists which were in dire short supply following the civil war. While most of these figures would be purged with a few exceptions during Stalin's Great Purge and a return of communist orthodoxy in the late 1930's the start of the Great Patriotic War would usher in a new era of National Bolshevik thought within the Soviet Union, but this time it would not come from outside forces such as the émigré community but instead from within the systems of soviet power.

When the German Army rolled through the vast flatlands of the western Soviet Union and looked poised to take Moscow, the Soviet Government went under a period of increasingly rejecting the former policy of internationalism and brotherhood among the workers of the world to a policy of increasing patriotism and nationalism. Within days of the invasion, following the rapid gains of the Wehrmacht and destruction of large parts of the Soviet Armed forces doubt began to spread throughout Soviet society as to whether the Red Army would be able to halt the German advance; in response to this development foreign minister Molotov and other members of the politburo released the following statement.

*"This is not the first time our people have been forced to deal with an arrogant enemy invader. Long ago our people responded to Napoleons campaign against Russia with a patriotic war... The Red Army and all of our people will once again lead a victorious patriotic war for our motherland, honor and freedom".*⁴⁸

As David Brandenberger notes, the choice of language is interesting as it demonstrates what the Soviet government thought the most effective to rally the Soviet people in support for the war effort and to deter defeatism and that was a return to nationalistic principles and a move away from the socialist ideals of the previous decades. The soviet people's connection to great men of the past would turn the

⁴⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism Ordinary life in Extraordinary Times Soviet Russia in the 1930's*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 95.

⁴⁸ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National identity, 1931-1956*. (London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 116.

tide against the fascist invaders, not their ideological commitment to socialist doctrine.⁴⁹ The Second World War would also intensify the simmering ethnic tensions within the Soviet Union, deportations of ethnic groups would considerably increase during the Second World War, the Soviet fear of collaboration was not only applied to elements of its own military, despite the purges. However, also entire ethnic groups, the Volga Germans and Islamic minorities were seen as especially suspect. This racial characterization of loyal and disloyal demonstrated the extent to which Nationalist sentiment had been embraced within the Soviet system and replicated the Russo Centric policies of the old Tsarist Empire⁵⁰ in which the Russian people were the central component of the country and other groups were subservient to the demands and wishes of the majority in direct contrast to the Soviet official ideology of uniting the global proletariat, despite national and racial differences, this is further shown by the portrayal as the Russian people as a "first among equals" and at the "head of the other peoples of the USSR" by high ranking Soviet figures such as the Central Committee ideology Chief, A.S. Shcherbakov.⁵¹ The Soviet system was gradually morphed into an increasingly Russo-centric state in which the Russian people as having been the first to embrace revolutionary Marxism and as having by being the largest demographics, fought the fascist invaders the most, were to be elevated to a leadership position and in the spirit of Leninism, act as the revolutionary vanguard of the different ethnic groupings of the USSR.

As the war carried on, the shift from socialist rhetoric intensified, ideas of revanchism and national revenge became more prevalent throughout Soviet propaganda and official party channels. Ilyn Ehrenburg, the war in the Soviet Union was a frantic war of annihilation as the German army marched deeper into the Soviet Union their brutality began to arouse a great desire for vengeance in the Soviet people⁵². While a policy of encouraging a proletarian revolution within Germany may have been expected from the internationalist Soviet Union, instead a policy of revenge and of total war was adopted against Germany, Ilyn Ehrenburg famously implored the red army, in his pamphlet "Kill" (with appropriate nationalistic fervor) during the battle of Stalingrad.

⁴⁹ Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 116-117.

⁵⁰ Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 117.

⁵¹ Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 119.

⁵² Anton Beevor, *Berlin: The Downfall, 1945*. (London: Penguin UK, 2002), 165.

*“Not count days; do not count miles. Count only the number of Germans you have killed. Kill the German- this is your mothers' prayer. Kill the German- this is the cry of your Russian earth. Do not waver. Do not let up. Kill.”*⁵³

The average Soviet soldier overtime would be bombarded with similar messages to Ilyen Ehrenburg's “Kill”, the German people were enemies of the Soviet Union, that they existed as not a human enemy but instead as a quasi-fictional demon that was only deserving of death. This policy of revenge would result in vast war crimes as the Red Army swept into German occupied lands and finally Germany proper, this policy of Nationalistic rhetoric wasn't unique to the USSR, all allied countries underwent a period of intense state sponsored nationalism, but what is unique is the fact that the USSR, the world's first socialist state was supposed to exist according to Marxist doctrine in distinct opposition to the very nationalism it spouted. The combination of the very existence of the state being justified as necessary to ensure socialism and the eventual foundation of global communism and the nationalistic Russian chauvinism shown throughout the late 30's and 40's would permeate throughout Soviet and later Russian political life. Eventually leading to the modern Russian National Bolshevik movement.

The post war era saw a decrease in National Bolshevik theory, as following the victory of the Soviet Union, the new political reality for the USSR was the establishment of friendly regimes within eastern Europe, while Russia was still defiantly at the head of this international block of socialist states, overt Russian centrism would have alienated the new socialist states in the east more than necessary, a return to more traditional Marxist doctrine would begin to take hold in the USSR, especially following the death of Stalin where the Soviet Nomenklatura would be reshuffled and many members that helped implement the policy of National Bolshevism would be purged from important areas of the Soviet State. It wouldn't be until the late 1980's and 90's that Russian National Bolshevism would make its return to the political scene.

As the Soviet Union began to crumble following Gorbachev's reforms which exposed the weaknesses of both the soviet economy and political system, as well as the rising Nationalist sentiment in the member

⁵³ Beevor, *Berlin: The Downfall*, 169.

states of the USSR such as Azerbaijan, in which ethnic tensions between the Armenian and Azerbaijan populations would spill over into targeted ethnic violence in the hope of ensuring a more homogenous society once the USSR inevitably collapsed⁵⁴. Following the succession of Yeltsin after the dissolution of the USSR following the August coup, his aggressive neoliberal shock therapy in which Russia would be turned from a state-run economy to a free market in a very short period, resentment and dissatisfaction in which the country was being run exploded as did unemployment, poverty and critical infrastructure failed such as healthcare, policing and housing⁵⁵. In this climate of declining standards of living and general quality of life for the Russian people, a conflict between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet began to brew as Yeltsin saw to dissolve the Supreme Soviet in order to carry out his reforms and consolidate power in the president. During the crisis opposition to Yeltsin codified around a variety of political movements, one of this being the “National Salvation Front” a political alliance that consisted of a large variety of radical movements, from Russian fascist groups to the new Russian Communist party, while this practical alliance of the far right and far left is interesting as it began the development of a tradition of the far left and far right working together against common enemies in Russia such as the National Salvation Front and The Other Russia (coalition). What is more interesting is one of the members of the “National Salvation Front”, the National Bolshevik Party. The first self-described National Bolshevik political party in the world, vastly different from the previous German pressure and publishing groups of the 1920’s. The National Bolshevik Party was founded as a reorganization of 6 smaller political parties that would seize upon the vast Soviet Nostalgia present within Russian for economic and political stability and recreate the Soviet System with a focus on state planning, renationalize former state industries and an aggressive foreign policy.

A few important early members of the NBP are Aleksandr Dugin and Eduard Limonov. Dugin’s influence on the NBP was his push for further collaboration with the far right in matters of foreign policy and opposition to the ruling parties of the Russian Federation, his theories of “Eurasianism” were especially prominent in the early NBP’s ideology, his ideas focused on a rejection of Neo Liberal western thought, dominated by both the UK and USA and instead a Russian state should focus on the Euro-Asia region

⁵⁴ Kushen, Robert, and Aryeh Neier. 1991. *Conflict in the Soviet Union: Black January in Azerbaidzhan* (New York: Human Rights Watch), 5.

⁵⁵ Siegelbaum Lewis H, “The Condition of Labor in Post-Soviet Russia: A Ten-Year Retrospective,” *Social Science History* 28, no.4 (2004): 637–65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267860>.

and embrace a move towards totalitarian government and that the world's land powers (Germany, Russia and China) should unite to create a new world order in opposition to the maritime powers of the UK and US.⁵⁶ While Limonov would advocate increasingly for social radicalism, as members would begin to firebomb embassies if they were viewed as hostile to the Russian people along with other actions against monuments that are seen as insulting to the Russian people⁵⁷. Eventually Limonov would develop an increasingly loyal following within the National Bolshevik movement until after his death his new party, "The other Russia" would go on to name themselves after their late founder. While Dugin would go on to influence the nascent NBP, a deep anti-western sentiment, especially directed towards the US, who they see as responsible for the collapse of the USSR and the suffering of the Russian people. The concept for which he would later leave the NBP over, was his "Fourth Political Theory", to Dugin there were three previous failed political theories, Liberalism, Communism, Fascism/Nationalism.⁵⁸ Dugin's insistence on an anticommunist ideology would leave him isolated in the progressively leftist NBP, ultimately leaving to work closer with the revolutionary right and eventually a supporter of Putin, creating a splinter group called the "National Bolshevik Front" which would have a distinctive right-wing approach compared to the more leftist National Bolshevik Party. The NBP would remain in fierce opposition to Putin and the Russian government until its ban in 2007, while the NBF would begin to support Putin against perceived western hostility to Russia. Dugin's influence is however still notable within the National Bolshevik movement in Russia, his Eurasianist ideas have held a long grasp on radicals within Russian political thought, a desire to expand the Russian state into former soviet territory and create a new power separate from the Western bloc.

⁵⁶ Marlene Laruelle. "Alexander Dugin and Eurasianism," in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the new threat to Liberal Democracy*, edited by Mark Sedgwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 155-169.

⁵⁷ Rogatchevski Andrei, "THE NATIONAL BOLSHEVIK PARTY (1993-2001): A BRIEF TIMELINE," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 41 (2007): 104. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40922234>.

⁵⁸ Laruelle, "Alexander Dugin and Eurasianism", 155-160.

The ideology of Russian National Bolshevism

Russian National Bolshevism as an ideology is a complicated and contradicting ideology, Russian National Bolshevism stands apart from both the radical left and radical right within Russian politics; it's lack of Marxist analysis distances it's self from the soviet nostalgic radical left.⁵⁹ While calls to abolish the "family" and calls to emulate certain aspects of the Soviet Union alienate it from the radical, anti-communist right.⁶⁰ While Russia had some of the first politically relevant National Bolshevik parties, Russian National Bolshevism should instead be viewed as a political trend throughout Russian politics unlike the German variant which was largely contained within a few small groups and theorists. Russian National Bolshevism as a political trend generally consists of the following motifs.

1. Strong Belief in Russian expansionism and Eurasianism.
2. Broad definition of "Russianness".
3. Exaltation of the Russian people and former Russian states.
4. Political pragmatism and ideological flexibility.

National Bolshevik ideology in the post-Soviet states usually correlates to strong Russophile attitudes, while not being limited to just the borders of the contemporary Russian state, National Bolshevik ideas are present almost anywhere where a sizable Russian minority are present, for instance Taras Kuzio takes notes on Russian separatist sentiment in Ukraine and describes the now banned Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine as National Bolshevik ⁶¹ and as being one of the key organizations in helping to spread Russian separatist ideas in eastern Ukraine, despite this most National Bolshevik organizations originate in the Russian heartland, but with some limited effect in Russian exclaves. National Bolshevism has a strong appeal to many Russians now living outside of Russia, the presence of the Soviet Union meant that their Russian ethnicity was of less significance as they all existed within the majority Russian Soviet Union and its autonomous republics. However, as the Soviet Union collapsed, they would find themselves in countries who were now attempting to create their own, new national identity, an

⁵⁹ "Program of The National-Bolshevik Party, "National Bolshevik Party, Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070501182900/http://eng.nbp-info.ru/cat19/index.html>.

⁶⁰ National Bolshevik Party, "Program of The National-Bolshevik Party."

⁶¹ Kuzio Taras, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2015), 110-112.

identity many of them didn't see themselves as being a part of. The feelings of isolation from the new national identity that many ethnic groups found themselves experiencing following the post-soviet nation building projects has left elements of Russians abroad wishing for reintegration into a Russian state, this works well with National Bolshevik policies of Eurasianism or Greater Russia, to many National Bolsheviks these ideas overlap greatly, it is their core ideological belief, that Russians must be brought back into an expanded Russian state, this belief has been the core of their political ideology dating back to the 1990's, the first NBP programme demanded "*A revise of the Russian borders. All the Russians will be united in one state. The territories of the splinter republics where Russians exceed 50% will be subsumed by Russia*" ⁶². The use of the word splinter, to describe the Republics that left the Union provides a glimpse at how they view the regions surrounding Russia, as a rightful part of a Eurasian/Greater Russian state that managed to slip away but should be reincorporated. However, their Russian nationalism splits from far right and fascist Russian nationalism in a variety of ways, it's understanding of what it means to be Russian, again in the first NBP programme they state "*Russianness is not determined by either color nor creed*" ⁶³ There also remains the fact that some members of the National Bolshevik movement would not be welcomed in a more traditionally conservative nationalist movement, Beness Aijo, sometimes referred to as "Black Lenin" ⁶⁴, is a black Russian National Bolshevik who has fought on the frontlines in the "Interbrigades" (the military wing of "the Other Russia" party) and has since been granted Russian citizenship following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. What remains important though, is the differences between right wing Russian nationalism and National Bolshevik nationalism. While fiercely Russian nationalists, they still have as Russian expert Rogatchevski notes, more in common with late era Soviet Nationalism than more traditionally discriminatory rightwing nationalism. ⁶⁵

The post-soviet National Bolsheviks still continue to borrow heavily from traditional nationalism, the "Essence of Time" movement is a self-declared "left wing nationalist movement" ⁶⁶, that borrows heavily

⁶² Rogatchevski Andrei, "Eduard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party and the Nazi Legacy: Titular Nations vs Ethnic Minorities." In *Cultural and Political Imaginaries in Putin's Russia*, ed. Niklas Bernsand (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 63–82.

⁶³ Rogatchevski, "Eduard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party", 67.

⁶⁴ Anna Matveeva, *Through Times of Trouble, Conflict within Southeastern Ukraine Explained Within* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018), 231.

⁶⁵ Rogatchevski, "Eduard Limonov's National Bolshevik Party", 71.

⁶⁶ "Essence of Time", <https://eot.su/>.

from National Bolshevik ideology, this group has a small contingent of fighters and activists present in the Donbass and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, they frequently use a combination of Soviet and Tsarist imagery side by side often combined on the same flag, as seen below by members of the essence of time in the Donbass.



Figure 1: *Volunteers of the “Essence of Time” Are Fighting in the DPR and LPR., October 8, 2014, Mosaic Forum.*

These two political statements while wildly contradictory as the Soviets and Russian Empire were entities inherently hostile to one another, it shows an element of National Bolshevik ideology often unnoticed underneath the red banners and glorification of the former Soviet Union. To National Bolsheviks any state that coincided with a perceived greatness of the Russian people is glorified. While supporting the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union may appear contradictory to National Bolsheviks it makes sense, because both of these states existed at a time when Russia was either one of the world's superpowers or an empire which spanned across Eurasia and had a perceived strength that to many Russians is lacking in the modern Russian federation, they wish for a return to a period of power and international prestige for the Russian people and these states possessed that quality despite their irreconcilable differences.

This leads to the final ideological reality of post-soviet National Bolsheviks, their political pragmatism and willingness to adapt their ideology depending on current circumstances. For much of their existence National Bolsheviks have existed in opposition to the Russian state unlike their right-wing counterparts

which frequently work alongside the ruling party of “United Russia” under the title “Systemic opposition” which generally work alongside the Kremlin in policy while still claiming to be in opposition to Putin, the far-right Liberal Democrats of Russia falls under this category.⁶⁷ Opposition groups not in this category often have their activities hindered by the police or FSB agents for much of their existence⁶⁸ The NBP/Other Russia party made frequent denouncements of the ruling elites of Russia and the Russian state and calls for a social revolution against the capitalist oligarchy.⁶⁹ Then following unrest in Ukraine, support for Russian separatism grew much to the acclaim of the National Bolsheviks, previously denied permission to hold protests on public squares were then granted as these protests began to align more with official state supported discourse⁷⁰. The NBP/Other Russia began to find increasing common ground with the Russian state, as Russian separatism intensified in Ukraine, ultimately cultivating to National Bolshevik divisions fighting alongside the Russian army in the invasion of Ukraine, such as the “Interbrigades”, a part of the Other Russia Party, a deliberate reference to the international brigades of the Spanish civil war. Rogatchevski, describes the National Bolsheviks as being “Known for their policy reversals”,⁷¹ while their policies may frequently change, what is clear through reading National Bolshevik work and the actions of National Bolshevik movements, is that their goals remain the same, the expansion of the Russian state and reincorporation of former soviet territories into a Russian dominated Eurasian superpower. Their pragmatism means they are less interested in how this ideal can become a political reality.

⁶⁷ Luke March, “Managing Opposition in a Hybrid Regime: Just Russia and Parastatal Opposition,” *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (2009): 504–27.

⁶⁸ Rogatchevski, “Eduard Limonov’s National Bolshevik Party”, 69.

⁶⁹ National Bolshevik Party, “Program of The National-Bolshevik Party.”

⁷⁰ Rogatchevski, “Eduard Limonov’s National Bolshevik Party”, 78.

⁷¹ Rogatchevski, “THE NATIONAL BOLSHEVIK PARTY (1993-2001): A BRIEF TIMELINE, “ 104.

The relevancy of Russian National Bolshevism

Russian National Bolshevism has remained a niche and small sub section of radical nationalism within Russian politics. Limited to small groups of radicals, engaging in individual or small actions against the Russian state and their opponents. However, following increasing isolation of Russia on the world stage from Europe and North America, Russia has refocused its efforts to Africa and building their relationship with China⁷². The growing antagonism between Russia and Europe has led to an increasing radical nationalism being permitted within Russian politics, with protestors being characterized as fifth columnists and traitors for condemning the war in Ukraine.⁷³ The National Bolshevik movement as one of the more radical irredentist movements among Russian nationalists, has the potential to grow rapidly, rapidly, particularly among Russian nationalists who have become disillusioned with the Russian state 's handling of the war, as is even seen even among high-ranking Russian statesmen, such as the leader of the" Wagner "private military contractor, which has recently denounced the defense minister for his lack of support to combat units in Ukraine. ⁷⁴ They remain unlikely to gain any significant power within the Russian state or political scene in the foreseeable future especially with Putin's more traditional nationalism dominating and the Russian ruling elite reluctant to cede power or incorporate new ideological factions into Russia's political system. Despite this, National Bolshevik ideology or at least nationalistic leftism with a glorification of the Soviet Union and its socialism has grown more prominent. The KPRF has increasingly utilized National Bolshevik rhetoric, declaring that the Russian people's culture and history intertwines them with "collectivism and patriotism" and instead of embracing the Russian Revolution as the creation of the world's first socialist state, it instead celebrates the reinvention of Russian power and saving Russia from the calamity of the post-World War one years. ⁷⁵ The move away from traditional revolutionary Marxism and towards a left-wing patriotism that celebrates the success of the USSR not on building socialism as more traditional Marxists would do, but instead on their contribution to rebuilding a great Russian state shows the impact revolutionary

⁷² Kaura Vinay, "Deepening Relationship between Russia and China: Implications for India in an Era of Strategic Uncertainty," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2019): 49–66.

⁷³ "Russians Are Snitching On Friends and Family Who Oppose the War in Ukraine," August 8, 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/xgyyed/russians-snitching-on-russians-ukraine>.

⁷⁴ "Wagner Boss Slams Russia's Military Leaders," POLITICO, February 21, 2023, accessed March 22, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/yevgeny-prigozhin-vladimir-putin-russia-war-wagner-boss-slams-russias-top-military-leaders-for-alleged-treason/>.

⁷⁵ "KPRF Program," KPRF, accessed March 21, 2023, <https://kprf.ru/party/program>.

nationalism and national Bolshevism have within Russian political radicalism. The KPRF was one of the first parties to openly call for the recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, the KPRF and parties like "The Other Russia Party" while not being near the seats of power, are a growing force within Russian nationalism and their politics of combining soviet nostalgia (which remains high among the majority of Russians)⁷⁶, nominal opposition to the current government but to what degree is debatable along with support for Russian expansionism, means that in the future National Bolshevism in Russia could make a resurgence of more public political support much like in the 1990's and early 2000's and that the relevancy of Russian/Post Soviet National Bolshevism while small is an area of political extremism with the potential for greater expansion and political development in the coming decades, the likelihood of this manifesting remains uncertain but the political realities and culture of the modern Russian state still provide some elements of relevancy for the revolutionary politics of National Bolshevism.

⁷⁶ Olena Nikolayenko, "Contextual Effects on Historical Memory: Soviet Nostalgia among Post-Soviet Adolescents," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41, no. 2 (2008): 243–59.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48609691>.

Conclusion

There remains great contrast between the ideological foundations and political relevancy between German and Russia/Post Soviet National Bolshevism, both in their political origins and their ideological outlook. German National Bolshevism was closely linked to the revolutionary politics of the KPD, with groups like the GRSN initially distant from the KPD but these groups began to grow increasingly closer as the KPD recognized their potential of a more nationalistic form of communism, the GRSN never contemplated joining the KPD as they felt it would hamper their appeal to the revolutionary right⁷⁷ they still declared support for the KPD and revolutionary Marxism, but with a distinct lack of enthusiasm when compared to earlier support, optimism around KPD's genuine move to National Bolshevism began to wane. The Russian National Bolsheviks however drew their ideological roots not from revolutionary Marxism but rather the nostalgia for a Marxist regime, that being the Soviet Union, the ideology of these National Bolsheviks had little in common with the state ideology of the USSR, but they still greatly respected the USSR on the fact that the USSR had greatly increased the standing of the Russian people internationally and built a strong regime capable of defeating foreign enemies, they resembled the early actions of the Smenovekhovtsy movement, rejecting elements of the USSR but instead urging cooperation for the sake of building a strong Russian state that could eventually be reformed into a more ideologically aligned regime, this especially corresponds with recent actions of National Bolsheviks in Russia who despite decades in opposition to Putin and the ruling powers of Russia have increasingly began working alongside the Russian state to achieve common goals while still professing a desire to change the structure of the Russian state and its economy.

Another aspect that contrasts the two different camps, the German and Russian National Bolsheviks, is their history of political actions. While the German groups remained politically radical with goals of revolution and violence, they never really amounted to more than a group of intellectuals publishing their thoughts and political analysis, whereas some active radicals did join various groups such as the GRSN and carried out more radical praxis, such as the small spreading of black propaganda against the shift to a more traditionally right-wing economic policy within the NSDAP⁷⁸. In contrast, the Russian

⁷⁷ Ward, *"Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics?"*, 523-524.

⁷⁸ "Hitlers Betrayal- Are We Still a Workers Party?" , 2022. Accessed March 4, 2023.

<https://arplan.org/2022/01/26/nation-and-revolution-kpd-sa-zersetzung-propaganda/>.

National Bolsheviks engaged in direct confrontation with the state such as the takeover of a cruiser before being dispersed along with the use of calling in bomb threats against their political opponents.⁷⁹ The radical nature of both groups cannot be disputed, however the German movement is based on the intellectual radicalism present throughout the Weimar republic at the time, with their ideology coming from philosophers and intellectuals, the Russian variant instead utilized people like Limonov while whilst intellectuals, their background consisted of not political analysis and great tomes of theory but instead poetry and revolutionary idealism, which creates a stark contrast between the two groups.

Despite this, there are still similarities between these groups, their distinctly revolutionary ambitions for one, as they generally reject reformism and the entering of the political system for anything other than spreading their message further, the NBP did run for elections they never as other radical groups have such as the KPRF tried to enter government through electoral means, the NBP and National Bolsheviks remain committed to use of force and violence. Other similarities are the fact that National Bolshevik parties and movements have remained niche and of limited political power throughout their existence, with little relevancy outside the study of radical ideologies. While National Bolsheviks have always had the ambition of becoming mass parties unlike other radical ideologies, especially Nationalist ones, which can believe in elements of Blanquist political thought, the idea that a few select group of radicals can change society. This has largely failed to materialize and instead they remain isolated politically from other radical ideologies and the citizenry at large. National Bolshevism can be described as a group of extremists, hoping to radicalize and eventually lead the newly enlightened patriotic masses in a showdown against “Globalists”, International Capital and foreign enemies. While in the meantime fighting for the national interests, engaging in confrontation with those opposed to the aims and engaging in a form of “propaganda of the deed” to get their revolutionary nationalist message to as many people as possible.

This essay has shown the complex nuances of National Bolshevik ideology and their political relevancy to the wider politics of both historical and contemporary societies. It has also acted as fulfilling a need within the wider historiography surrounding the National Bolshevik ideology, which has a distinct lack of sources in certain aspects, especially with the contemporary National Bolshevik movements, there remains a need for further research and discussion to be done within this area of radical political ideologies. The perception of National Bolshevism has shifted throughout the Historiography, while the

⁷⁹ Rogatchevski, THE NATIONAL BOLSHEVIK PARTY, 99.

20th century remained the century of Nationalism, in the western political climate, Nationalism is often looked as a relic of the past as the West continues towards greater globalization and integration, combining “Nationalism” with “Bolshevism” the declared enemy of the western way of life, leads to many assumptions of the ideology being made especially within the west. These assumptions can often be lazy and lacking in research, with an impression of National Bolshevism instead being a reaction to the name, rather than of their political declarations and manifesto’s, which often reveal a deeper, more thought-out analysis than the term “National Bolshevism” implies.

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